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Arnold Horelick

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SOVIET POLICY DILEMMAS IN ASIA

Arnold L. Horelick\*  
The Rand Corporation

Spurred at the end of the last decade by the outbreak of armed conflict along the Sino-Soviet border and by the new U.S. Administration's first steps to disengage from Vietnam, the Soviet Union embarked on a course of intensified diplomatic activity in Asia, coupled with highly visible displays of Soviet naval power in Pacific and Indian Ocean waters, that quickly captured world attention. Measured by almost any conventional standard--states with which the Soviet Union has diplomatic relations, exchanges of high-level visits, trade turnover, deployments of land, air, and sea forces into the area, and so forth--the USSR is now engaged in the affairs of Asia on a considerably wider front than ever before. Yet all of this activity has brought few tangible rewards to the Soviet Union. Moscow has not emerged as a conspicuous beneficiary of the post-Vietnam regroupment of Asian political forces, as many Western observers had earlier feared, and the USSR does not appear to be well-positioned to make major political gains soon in Asia.

A Policy in Search of a Focus

For all of its apparent activism, Soviet policy in most of Asia seems peculiarly lacking in clarity of direction or sharpness of focus. Only with respect to China, where it confronts a declared foe who is unambiguously hostile, does the USSR's increased self-assertiveness

\* Revised and expanded version of a talk delivered at the Eighth International Conference of the Korean Institute of International Studies, in Seoul, Republic of Korea, on 6 July, 1976.

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seem harnessed to relatively clear objectives. Elsewhere in Asia, it will be argued in this paper, the interplay of cross-pressures and competing priorities has imparted to Soviet policies a high degree of tentativeness, ambiguity, and ambivalence. Indeed, while Soviet leaders have repeatedly asserted since 1969 that the USSR, by virtue of its geography and global power status, must now be accorded an appropriate place in the sun of Asian politics, the Soviet Union has failed to articulate its larger continental interests beyond its ill-defined catchall proposal, now seven years old, to join in creating an "Asian collective security system." The hostile or distinctly unenthusiastic response accorded to that proposal in most Asian capitals epitomizes the USSR's failure to find appropriate diplomatic means for promoting an all-Asian security management role for itself.

The question to be addressed is what accounts for this apparent paradox of mushrooming Soviet political activity in Asia that seems to lack a central focus or clear direction, and of a growing Soviet military and naval presence that seems to have very limited political utility?

Some foreign policy analysts of the "bureaucratic politics" persuasion would no doubt argue that this is a false paradox inasmuch as the foreign policies of governments are not guided by a comprehensive rationality capable of producing coherent and integrated foreign political behavior, but rather by congeries of imperfectly coordinated and competitive organizations whose policy outputs inevitably reflect the internal bargaining and compromises that produced them. There is much to be said in principle for this proposition and, when empirical data can be found against which to test it, it can usefully serve to frame hypotheses and to inform analysis. But we have little reliable information regarding the organizational preferences, strategies and tactics of sub-units forming the Soviet foreign policy community, or of the patterns and character of their interactions. Furthermore, given rather compelling evidence (for example, from Soviet foreign policy toward Europe) that the summit of the

Soviet policy community does have the capability to concert and impose on the bureaucracies below it coherent and integrated policies, we are justified in searching for more comprehensive explanations. The alternative is simply to go endlessly around the circle defined by the proposition that Soviet policy in Asia is what it is because lots of Soviet bureaucrats (whoever they are) are busily doing their things (whatever those are).

#### Soviet Policy Constraints

Two different kinds of factors seem to be pertinent in searching for some larger explanations. The first set includes those basic, enduring factors, such as geography, history, ideology, political culture and diplomatic style, that exert constraining influences of a more or less permanent kind on Soviet policy in Asia generally. The second set of factors pertains to the special circumstances of the international relations of Asia at this particular stage of development; their constraining influence may be relaxed, intensified, or otherwise modified by events.

The more enduring constraints deserve more detailed consideration than can be given to them here, but might perhaps be expressed succinctly in terms of generalized perceptions of the Soviet Union that appear to be widely shared by Asian political elites. Throughout Asia, with few exceptions, the USSR is seen as an "outsider," an essentially European power, knocking at Asia's door for reasons that remain unclear, but are widely suspected, and comporting itself often with a heavy-handedness that betrays a poor understanding of or insensitivity to indigenous political cultures and national styles. The vast area of the USSR geographically located in Asia is seen by Asians essentially as an extension of European Russia, the heartland of the Soviet Union, from which the power, culture, and global thrust of the Soviet state derive. Ever since the Bandung Conference of 1955, when a Soviet bid to participate was rejected even by states favorably disposed to the USSR politically, insistent Soviet efforts to be admitted into the community of Asian states have been repeatedly rejected. Indeed, the continuing efforts of Soviet

leaders to gain acceptance of the USSR as an indigenous Asian political force have only deepened suspicion and mistrust of the USSR, providing ammunition for Chinese Communist efforts to portray the Soviet Union as an interloper and aspiring hegemonial power.

The persistent and counter-productive Soviet campaign to establish for itself an authentically Asian identity reflects another apparently deep-seated characteristic of Soviet behavior that constrains Moscow's ability to exercise influence effectively: insensitivity to the distinctive features of the Asian environment and to the national character and temperaments of the Asian elites and peoples whom Soviet diplomacy has attempted to engage. Early Cold War predictions that the USSR would enjoy a potentially decisive advantage in the Third World over the alien West, discredited by its imperialist and colonialist past, have turned out to be grossly exaggerated.

#### Disorienting Impact of Asian Structural Changes

Moreover, the radical restructuring of Asian international politics during the 1960s has disoriented the foreign policies of the USSR no less than those of other external powers, depriving the Soviet leadership of a serviceable compass by which to chart its course. Ironically, during the first post-war decade-and-a-half, when the Soviet Union was relatively weak and, outside of Europe, without substantial assets and resources for realizing any far-reaching external policy objectives, the purposes of Soviet Asian policy seemed clearer, or at any rate, were more clearly perceived by other powers. Soviet policy appeared to be directed toward the goal of weakening and, if possible, eliminating U.S. power from close-in areas of Northeast Asia--from China, Korea, and Japan. A major first step toward this goal was dramatically (and unexpectedly) realized in China in 1949, but further progress was stalemated in 1950-1953 by determined American resistance (again, probably unexpected) to North Korea's effort to extend Communist domination by force over the entire Korean peninsula. The Korean misadventure double-bolted against the USSR the door to Japan, which had already been slammed shut by American monopolization of the occupation. More ambitious Soviet objectives with respect to Japan thereafter had to be subordinated to the slow and halting

process of normalizing relations. Meanwhile, the American presence both in Japan and South Korea became more deeply entrenched, and Soviet prospects of removing American power from the Soviet Union's Asian periphery grew more remote and problematic.

A variety of factors combined after the Korean War to complicate Soviet policy in Asia and to prevent the articulation, much less the execution, of a larger continental design. Even before the onset of overt hostility in relations between Moscow and Peking, the Soviet Union failed to concert anything like a joint Asian policy with the PRC, a prerequisite for any far-reaching Soviet advance in Asia in those years. Indeed, their failure to do so, even under the umbrella of ostensibly fraternal relations, may have signalled to the leaders on both sides the limits of what was possible from their partnership, given their divergent interests and priorities. By diminishing expectations both in Moscow and Peking of benefits to be reaped from maintaining the alliance, the experience of the 1950s may have facilitated the escalation of conflict in the early 1960s.

But clearly, it *was* the escalation of the Sino-Soviet conflict that dealt the decisive blow to whatever was still left of the early post-war thrust of Soviet policy in Asia. Beginning in the mid-1960s, even during the large-scale American involvement in Indochina, the anti-American impulse of Soviet Asian policy was increasingly subordinated to an anti-Chinese posture. In operative Soviet policy terms, containment of China now clearly appears to enjoy priority over expulsion of the United States.

### China

Whatever perceptions of threat or estimates of coercive utility may have motivated Soviet policy toward China over the past decade, the resultant set of Soviet decisions and actions has only deepened Chinese hostility toward the USSR and narrowed Soviet policy options elsewhere in Asia. The Soviet leadership's preoccupation with efforts to contain China, discredit its leaders, and discourage other Asian states from collaborating with the PRC appears to be based on the expectation that as long as control of China remains in hostile hands, the inevitable growth

of Chinese power and influence will sooner or later convert what Moscow probably still regards as a potential threat to Soviet security into a real and critical menace. To position itself to deal with this potential, the USSR since 1965 has conducted a massive military buildup along the Sino-Soviet border, where a substantial fraction of its aggregate conventional and peripheral nuclear strike forces are now concentrated, facing Chinese forces that are vastly inferior by virtually every measure of strength; the USSR reportedly also enjoys a numerical advantage in regular ground forces deployed close to the border, although the overall theater military manpower balance remains heavily weighted in the PRC's favor. Many Western analysts (and, in private conversations, some Soviet specialists as well) have regarded this as a characteristic Soviet over-reaction, which has had no demonstrable current utility, but has served to convert the most pessimistic Soviet expectations about China into a virtually self-fulfilling prophecy.

The longer-run Soviet interest, and almost certainly the preference of the present Soviet leadership, is to achieve a reconciliation or, at least, a reduction of tensions and accommodation with the PRC. By permanently altering the military geography of the Sino-Soviet border, however, the Soviet leaders have sharply reduced chances for a radical improvement in Sino-Soviet relations, placing narrow limits on the extent to which the two sides could move even toward limited detente if leadership changes or a reassessment of interests on one or the other side made that seem desirable. Thus, even if future Soviet and Chinese leaderships could agree on a resolution of China's territorial claims against the USSR and to a partial withdrawal or thinning out of mobile military forces stationed along the border, the vast military infrastructure of air fields, depots, fortifications, fixed missile sites, and permanent garrisons that have been installed by the USSR (and, in response, to a much lesser extent by the PRC) have locked the two sides into a confrontation posture from which it would be extraordinarily difficult for them to extricate themselves.

#### Other Communist-Ruled Asian States

Uneasiness or suspicion about Soviet intentions is widespread in Asia, cutting across the political spectrum and including Communist, as

well as neutralist non-Communist and Western-oriented anti-Communist states. The PRC, once the Soviet Union's principal global as well as Asian ally, now regards the USSR as its main enemy. North Korea, the second Communist power in Asia, has had a history of uneasy, and, at times, tense relations with Moscow, including an abortive effort by a pro-Soviet Korean party faction to displace Kim Il-sung in 1956 and Soviet-North Korean polemics in the early 1960s that persisted until Khrushchev's ouster in 1964. Whatever the ties of mutual interest that bind Moscow and Pyongyang, they are not bonds of mutual affection. In Vietnam, the Soviet position since the fall of Saigon to the Communists has seemed to improve at the expense of China, but Hanoi did not subordinate itself to Moscow when its dependence on the Soviet Union was far greater, and its leaders have good historical cause to remain wary of Moscow's propensity to sacrifice Vietnamese interests in pursuit of its larger policies (toward France in the 1950s and the United States in the early 1970s). The new leaders of Laos appear also to be leaning somewhat toward the USSR, but maintain a respectful posture toward the PRC, preferring to play a balancing game between the two. In the new, reclusive Cambodia, the Soviet position appears to be no stronger than that of any other external power, and is evidently less secure than that of the Chinese. Indeed, among the Communist states of Asia, the Soviet Union can count reliably only on Mongolia, perhaps the last remaining genuine Soviet satellite, a sparsely populated state that is not terribly consequential in the larger scheme of things, except as a staging base for Soviet ground and air forces poised against the PRC. Alone among the Communist-ruled Asian states, Mongolia has endorsed the USSR's bid to create a collective security system for the region. The independent Communist states have ignored the Soviet proposal, since any expression of interest would constitute a gratuitous provocation of the PRC. Ironically, the Communist victory in Laos and Cambodia, which were prime targets of the Soviet proposal initially, has eliminated two prospective candidates for membership in the Soviet-sponsored system.

#### ASEAN Countries

In recent years, the Soviet Union has made determined efforts to broaden its entree to the ASEAN countries of Southeast Asia. Spurred

by the American withdrawal from Vietnam, the USSR perceptibly stepped up the pace of its diplomatic activity in the region, evidently to preempt or to counterbalance parallel and competing moves by the PRC. Although the Soviet Union has now established diplomatic relations with all of the ASEAN countries, exchanging high-level diplomatic visits and modestly increasing trade volume with some, the results have on balance been meager and the USSR remains but a marginal factor in the foreign policy calculations of these countries. ASEAN leaders see Hanoi first, and then Peking, as the foreign capitals with which accommodation has to be sought to ensure the stability of international relations in Southeast Asia. Improved relations with the Soviet Union are welcomed by ASEAN countries primarily for balancing purposes against the PRC; it is the passive weight rather than the active influence of the Soviet Union that is being sought.

#### India and the Subcontinent

There are some exceptions to what appears to be a generally bleak picture for the Soviet Union on the "hearts and minds" side of the Asian political equation; of these, the most important is India, with which Soviet relations are now closer than with any other major Asian power. Apart from neighboring Afghanistan, which has no serious option but to conform, and Iraq, which is an Asian state only in a technical sense, India is the only non-Communist state in the continent with which Moscow has been able to conclude a Treaty of Friendship. But while the USSR has become India's principal arms supplier and sided openly with it in its war against Pakistan, India can hardly be counted a genuine ally of the Soviet Union. Because of its larger political interests in the non-aligned Third World and its unwillingness to cut itself off from other non-Communist sources of external assistance, India clearly prefers to maintain a certain distance from the Soviet Union and to avoid the appearance of general alignment with it. Thus, Mrs. Gandhi has politely rejected repeated Soviet invitations to India to endorse the USSR's collective security proposal, an endorsement which would go a long way toward legitimizing the Soviet plan elsewhere in Asia. As India's willingness to take the first steps toward rapprochement with the PRC suggested, Delhi conducts an essentially independent policy which parallels that of

the Soviet Union only at those points where the mutual interests of the two parties happen to coincide.

Elsewhere on the subcontinent, the Soviet Union has not reaped the substantial political gains it may have anticipated as backer of India's successful effort to achieve regional military hegemony. Moscow's disappointment with the evolution of Bangladesh after the 1975 coup has been openly expressed. And the USSR's primary commitment to India places severe limits on what Moscow can credibly offer to Pakistan, despite Islamabad's disenchantment with its erstwhile Western allies and Chinese backers.

#### Japan

If the Soviet-Indian Friendship Treaty represents the high water mark of recent Soviet diplomacy in Asia, then Moscow's failure to conclude a peace treaty with Tokyo epitomizes what is probably its greatest diplomatic failure. Nowhere is the ambivalence and immobility of Soviet policy in the face of severe cross-pressures and conflicting priorities more apparent than in Moscow's stalled relations with Tokyo.

Five years ago opportunities seemed promising for the USSR to shore up its disadvantaged position as odd-man-out in the big power quadrilateral relationship in East Asia by drawing closer to a Japan that was signalling its receptivity. Stung by the "Nixon shocks" of 1971-1972 and fearful that it was being taken for granted by the United States, now preoccupied with cementing its ties to the PRC, the Japanese government seemed open to fresh approaches by the Soviet Union.

The essential precondition for a more flexible and venturesome Soviet approach to Japan had been satisfied in the 1960s when Soviet Asian pre-occupations shifted from the struggle against the United States (which, in the light of the central role attached by Japan to its mutual security treaty with America, precluded serious Soviet diplomacy in Tokyo) to the Sino-Soviet conflict. Once the Soviet Union abandoned as an operative policy goal the neutralization of Japan, it was free to pursue other objectives aimed at bolstering or protecting the USSR's position against

China--for example, securing Japanese economic assistance in the development of Siberia and the Soviet Far East and forestalling a potentially anti-Soviet Japanese turn toward China, if not evoking a more positive Japanese stance vis-a-vis the Soviet Union.

Given the high level of Sino-Soviet tension reached in 1969, the dramatic turn in Sino-American relations shortly thereafter, Japan's irritation at Washington's failure to coordinate its China policy with Tokyo, the normalization of Sino-Japanese relations, and Chinese efforts to spoil Soviet-Japanese relations, classical balance-of-power analysts would have expected rather quick and determined Soviet efforts to exploit the new situation. What is surprising therefore is not the activation of Soviet diplomacy toward Japan, which did follow immediately on the heels of 1971 "Nixon shocks," but its faltering and vacillating course, and the failure of Soviet diplomacy to seize fresh opportunities. After more than five years of fairly intensive diplomatic activity, Soviet-Japanese negotiations on the whole range of outstanding issues between the two countries remain in a condition of stalemate.

Moscow's unyielding position on the Northern Territories question and its crude rejection of Japanese claims as outright "revanchism," have blocked progress on a peace treaty, without which normalization of Soviet-Japanese relations will remain incomplete. While trade relations between the two countries--large in Soviet terms, small in Japanese--continue to grow at a modest pace, massive Japanese participation in the USSR's huge Siberian energy development programs, the subject of stop-and-go negotiations for more than a decade, is now less likely than ever, thanks in part to a stiffening of Soviet terms and to vacillations of Soviet enthusiasm. Meanwhile, aggressive Soviet policing of Japanese fishing boats, as well as provocative deployments of Soviet air and naval forces and intelligence ships close to Japanese waters, continue to provide fresh irritants to Soviet-Japanese relations.

It is true that popular feelings of hostility and suspicion toward the Soviet Union run deep in Japan and that even the most sensitive and skillful Soviet diplomacy would encounter powerful resistance to any large

improvement in Soviet-Japanese relations. But Soviet diplomacy toward Japan has been characterized more by harshness and heavy-handedness than by skill and sensitivity. How much of this Soviet behavior reflects reciprocal Soviet hostility and suspicion and how much stems from inherent deficiencies in Soviet understanding of Japanese political culture and national temperament is unclear; surely both elements are present, in unknown proportions.

At bottom there appears to be a fundamental ambivalence in Soviet attitudes toward Japan's new striving to define a political role for itself in Asia and in the world commensurate with its great economic power. To the extent that such a new more independent role might provide room for a major improvement in Soviet-Japanese relations, gaining for the USSR greater access to Japanese economic strength, the prospect is alluring; but with respect to Japan's warmaking capacity, the *status quo* may be deeply reassuring to the Soviet leadership and worth preserving. Foreign policies can change quickly while the military capabilities associated with superpower status, once acquired, are not easily given up. So long as Japan's military power remains weakly developed, even an adverse shift in Tokyo's foreign policy toward the Soviet Union cannot create severe new security problems for the USSR. But an assertive Japan that, for whatever reason, is no longer dependent for its basic security on the United States is most unlikely to remain a third-rate military power. And such a Japan, even if its political relationship with the Soviet Union were to improve while it made the transition to an independent military posture, could ultimately confront the USSR with a threat overshadowing that posed by China.

#### Korea

Soviet policy on the Korean question provides a particularly striking illustration of how cross-pressures emanating from both global and regional sources, on the one hand, and commitments to an ally that enjoys a high degree of autonomy by virtue of the Sino-Soviet rift, on the other, combine to complicate and even to paralyze Soviet policy. The primary Soviet global relationship with the United States, the USSR's festering conflict with China, its

policy toward Japan, as well as its alliance relationship with North Korea, all come to bear in the Korean Peninsula.

The outbreak of large-scale warfare in Korea is almost certainly perceived by the Soviet leadership as a contingency gravely threatening Soviet interests since under existing US-ROK security arrangements and force dispositions, immediate American participation would be virtually automatic. Regardless of the level or character of Soviet support for North Korea in such a war, the involvement of the United States in armed conflict with a Soviet ally sharing a common border with the USSR would place Soviet-American relations under heavier strain than any event at least since the 1962 Cuban missile crisis. Unless quickly terminated by political or military means, or conducted by the U.S. with 1950's-type constraints that are probably no longer feasible, a second Korean round would have much higher escalatory potential than the first.

Even if the Soviet Union refrained from direct participation, as it did in the first Korean war, it is hard to conceive of a war outcome that would serve Soviet interests. Soviet failure to prevent a North Korean defeat would deal a heavy blow to Soviet credibility as a super-power and aspiring Asian security manager. Even a North Korean victory (improbable *without* direct Soviet assistance, assuming U.S. participation) would entail potentially heavy political costs that would not, from the Soviet Union's perspective, be offset by great gains. Detente, or even the pretense of cooperative Soviet-American relations, would almost certainly not survive such an outcome. The effects on Japan would depend largely on how the United States had conducted itself, but there is a high probability that a Communist conquest of the South would push Japan toward serious rearmament, either independently (in which case Japan would be more likely to exercise the nuclear option), or in concert with the United States, but now with Japan playing a substantial and, in conventional Asian-based forces, probably the major military role in the alliance.

Not only does the USSR have strong reasons for avoiding a new conflict in Korea, it has no comparably strong reasons to favor the reunification of Korea under Pyongyang's control. Such a Korea would be even less

readily controllable than the north is now; the possibility that a united Korea might eventually gravitate toward Peking would magnify greatly the adverse consequences for the USSR of a Pyongyang-Peking axis; at the very least, a reunified, Communist-dominated Korea would be in an even stronger position than now to play off Moscow against Peking to its own advantage, since the stakes involved for either in "losing" Korea would have grown.

Presumably for such reasons the USSR has for many years exercised considerable restraint regarding the quantity and particularly the quality of weapons assistance that it has provided to Kim Il-Sung. It appears to be deliberate Soviet policy to prevent North Korea from acquiring a military capability sufficient to embolden it to launch an attack independently, without prior assurance of assistance from one or both of its allies. To appreciate the care Moscow has taken to control the pace and scope of North Korea's military buildup over the years, one need only compare Soviet military assistance to the north to what the USSR has been willing to provide Arab clients who are, by comparison to North Korea, distant from the USSR, and to whom the Soviet Union is not formally committed by alliance ties or ideological brotherhood.

The clear interest of the Soviet Union in avoiding a new large-scale war on the Korean Peninsula is not matched, however, by any strong positive incentive to promote a political accommodation between the two Koreas. For such an accommodation only promises to perpetuate a South Korea that would almost certainly remain implacably anti-Communist and tied to the United States. In stable conditions of peace, South Korea would continue to outstrip the North in almost every dimension of national growth. This does not mean that a two-Koreas solution would be unacceptable to the Soviet Union if it were acceptable to North Korea, but only that the Soviet Union lacks both sufficient incentives and sufficient leverage to press an intransigent North Korea toward such an accommodation with the South.

Under present conditions, Soviet adoption of a two-Koreas posture in the face of North Korean resistance, would be both costly and futile, and therefore pointless. Moreover, given a Sino-Soviet relationship that

is not substantially more accommodative than now, any such policy departure by the USSR that was not matched for its own reasons by the PRC, would inevitably drive North Korea toward China. And a Peking-Pyongyang axis is much more undesirable for Moscow than a perpetuation of the present stalemate in the peninsula. The key to a Korean settlement, therefore, lies in North Korean, not Soviet hands.

#### The Spectre of Anti-Soviet Collusion

In Korea, as elsewhere in Asia, the Soviet Union sits in the game holding potentially powerful cards which it cannot play effectively, a predicament that an *arriviste* power is likely to find profoundly frustrating. Even worse, in Northeast Asia, the power locus of the continent, Soviet leaders, indulging in no more than their customary paranoia, can find ample evidence that their rivals may be combining against them. With neither the United States, China, nor Japan now disposed to seek hegemony in the area for itself, their interests converge on denying a hegemonial role to the USSR, the one world power that all three perceive to be in an expansive foreign policy phase.

The Chinese have articulated this community of interests between Peking, Washington, and Tokyo most clearly. To counter the USSR's Asian collective security proposal aimed at gaining for the Soviet Union an acknowledged central role in managing Asian security relations, the PRC advances its "anti-hegemony" formula, unmistakably intended to deny precisely such a role to the USSR. Both the United States and Japan, in joint statements signed with China in 1972, not only abjured any effort to impose their own hegemony in the Asian region of the Pacific, but also undertook "to oppose any attempts by any other country...to establish such a hegemony." The United States officially has taken no stand on the Soviet Asian collective security proposal, but in enunciating Washington's new "Pacific Doctrine" in December 1975, President Ford failed conspicuously even to mention the Soviet Union, while emphasizing America's special ties with Japan and joint U.S.-PRC opposition to any hegemony in Asia. From Moscow's perspective, there is probably little doubt about where Washington stands in the competition between the PRC's effort to exclude Soviet power from Asia and the USSR's campaign to be counted in.

In this context, the growing visibility of Soviet naval power in the Pacific and Indian Oceans may represent not so much the military arm of an expansive political strategy in the Asian-Pacific area as a second-best offshore substitute for a continental policy that has been frustrated by the Soviet Union's principal competitors. Powerful Soviet ground and air forces in Asia can readily reach China, against which they are poised, but they have manifestly failed to coerce the PRC into seeking a political accommodation on Soviet terms. Insofar as these forces are also perceived as threatening by the Japanese, they only reinforce Tokyo's commitment to the mutual security treaty with the United States and make Chinese warnings about Soviet hegemonial intentions seem more plausible.

Elsewhere in Asia, massive Soviet ground and air forces along the Sino-Soviet border serve to dramatize the extent to which the Sino-Soviet conflict continues to tie down Soviet power and to drain energies that might otherwise be directed elsewhere. So long as the still powerful U.S. Pacific Fleet remains committed to the defense of American allies and interests in Asia, the appearance of the Soviet Navy in Asian waters can serve as little more than a reminder to the littoral states that the Soviet Union does aspire to play a regional role and that the United States no longer rules the seas by default. It is difficult to write a credible scenario whereby the USSR could independently and without provoking a larger conflict employ its naval forces to affect in any substantial way the international politics of Asia. In any case, while there is some evidence that a number of Asian states regard the deployment of Soviet naval power in Pacific waters as disturbing, either because it runs counter to their interest in neutralizing the region or is regarded as a harbinger of Soviet imperialist ambitions, there is no evidence that the appearance of Soviet naval forces has promoted new tendencies anywhere in Asia to accommodate to Soviet power or to seek special military relations with the USSR.

#### A Soviet "Selective Security" System

Given the inherent geographical, cultural, and political limits on the Soviet Union's capacity to project its influence deeply into

Asia, and the special circumstances of contemporary Asian international politics, notably the constraints on Soviet freedom of maneuver imposed by the festering Sino-Soviet conflict, a Soviet Grand Design for Asia, is almost certainly illusory. As a best available approximation of a broad Soviet continental strategy, we can expect the USSR to make every effort to play an increasingly active and visible role in the international politics of Asia in coming years, primarily by expanding its network of bilateral relations of a more or less conventional diplomatic and economic type with a growing number of Asian states, including some from which Soviet presence and influence have heretofore been virtually excluded. "Normalization" rather than "detente"--not to speak of alliance--is likely to characterize Soviet relations with most Asian states in the near future; and the inclination of Asian political elites to take out comparatively low-cost, low-profile insurance against an uncertain future by opening a political dialogue with Moscow appears to be growing. For those concerned with stable and orderly development of international relations in Asia, this trend need not be a cause for great anxiety, and might even have salutary effects, particularly if broadened and deepened Soviet diplomatic involvement lead the USSR to assume a greater share of responsibility for providing economic and technical assistance to the developing countries of the region.

Soviet resource constraints, however, limit the growth of Soviet influence and presence in Asia through the employment of conventional commercial and diplomatic assets. Soviet leaders have made much in recent years of the fact that two-thirds of Soviet territory lies east of the Ural Mountains, but as an Asian state the Soviet Union is also an underdeveloped country and aspires to be a massive importer of economic resources and technologies from the advanced industrial countries. Economically, the Soviet Union has comparatively little to contribute to the other developing countries of Asia, except on a highly selective basis; surely it cannot effectively compete in this regard with the United States, Western Europe, or Japan, except by concentrating its efforts in a few places as it has done in India. Ideologically, the Soviet Union has long since ceased to be a magnetic force in Asia.

There is a danger, therefore, that the combination of (1) Soviet ambition to acquire a leadership role in Asian politics, driven by profound concern over the long-term strategic implications of Sino-Soviet hostility, and (2) severely limited means for achieving that role either by conventional commercial or traditional diplomatic means, could channel Soviet assertiveness in Asia in directions far removed from the promotion of order and stability. Unable to find takers for its proposal to join in building a *collective* security system on a pan-Asian basis, the Soviet Union might instead offer security *selectively* to those Asian states embroiled in regional conflicts that might find themselves without access to other external sources of effective political-military support. It is precisely the provision of such support that has been the Soviet Union's stock in trade so far in the Third World. Where the USSR has been successful in planting its presence and expanding its influence abroad, it has done so by massive transfers of military resources and by flexing its muscles internationally on behalf of clients engaged in regional conflicts with their neighbors. In Vietnam and India as well as in the Middle East and Angola, Soviet military power and political support have made an enormous difference in the outcome of regional conflicts. With America's willingness to extend support on a similar scale and with comparable firmness increasingly doubted in many quarters in Asia, and with China's future policies and military capacity still highly uncertain, Moscow's announcement that it is available as an alternative source of security support cannot lightly be dismissed. Soviet willingness to play such a role, however, is unlikely to be consequential if invitations are not forthcoming. As never before in modern Asian history, the probability of external military intervention depends above all on the play of indigenous political forces which neither the USSR nor any other outside power can reliably control.